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Geomancing Dib's Transcultural Expression in Translation

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Madeleine Campbell,
"Geomancing Dib's Transcultural Expression in Translation"
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Abstract: In her article "Geomancing Dib's Transcultural Expression in Translation" Madeleine Campbell analyses Mohammed Dib's treatment of symbols and mythologies from Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions. Campbell contextualizes lexical, syntactic, and intertextual elements in Dib's texts with reference to Oriental schemas including the pre-Islamic *Mu'allaqāt*, *The Conference of the Birds* by Farīd ud-Dīn Attār and elements of Sufi symbolism. Further, Campbell examines how these elements serve to develop a liminal yet multilingual "reference system" within the framework of the French language. Dib's poetic aesthetic goes beyond surrealism in the intensity of its ontological enquiry and appears to go beyond Sufism in its denial of the "essence" or "absolute" central to the Sufi quest. Dib displaces the dualism of essence and existence by seeking the in-between, the relation, the movement between subject and object. Through this singular syncretic approach, pre-Islamic evocation and Sufi-inspired form and image are transformed to deliver a distinctive contemporary nomadic oeuvre in a secular expression of the Sufi "Imagination" (after Henri Corbin) which invites a performative approach to translation.

Madeleine CAMPBELL

Geomancing Mohammed Dib's Transcultural Expression in Translation

In Mohammed Dib's 1994 *L'Infante Maure* a solitary Lyyli Belle talks about her world, her Nordic mother, her Maghrebi father, the trees in her garden, the light and the snows of her northern landscape. During her father's lengthy absence she wills herself to the desert, where she comes upon a Bedouin tent and finds a sheik sitting at its entrance. She decides he is the paternal grandfather she never met: "Hello grandpa ... / — Hello to you. / Hello to us? Can't he see that I came alone? / — I'm alone, grandpa. / — You're not alone. You have one angel perched on your right, one angel on your left. No one is ever alone" (147-48); unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine). In his collection of essays *Dans le soulèvement*, Habib Tengour, editor of Dib's collected poems, relates the same story about angels: the "luminous creature" on the right records people's good intentions and actions, the one on the left, their evil thoughts and deeds (23). Although Dib made the choice to write in French, he activated symbols and mythologies common to the Judeo-Christian and Islamic tradition in an attempt to communicate across cultures:

The process of expression, of writing, like the process of reading, of comprehending, is only straightforward on the surface. I shall be more concrete and give an example this time of what, in the context of these reflections, qualifies as a type of reference. Algerians live with, on their doorstep, one of the greatest deserts in the world. Even when they ignore it, even when they forget it, it is there and not just at their door but inside them, inside the dark crypt of their psyche. An integral element of their physical landscape, it is no less a part of the landscape of their mind, and the desert, let us not forget, all three revealed religions were born there. Whether in this or that desert does not alter very much: every desert resembles the desert, as water does water. It is everywhere the site of negation of History, just as, through their passage and their appearance there, religions are ahistorical. Site of every beginning, the desert is also the site of every regression. (*L'Arbre* 17-18)

In the above-quoted passage Dib offers the desert as a "type of reference", a key of sorts capable of opening up and of leading into the "reference system" of Maghrebi literature (17). The above in turn offers an insight into the following extract from Dib's 1992 novel *Le Désert sans détour* where the narrator uses the metaphor of a keyhole to introduce his two Beckettian protagonists, Hagg-Bar and his servant Siklist: "Yes, those footprints. Two double tracks. They leave their imprint in the sand and come closer, gain ground. And so they are two. But who are they? Who is coming? / And they take shape, inscribe themselves in the brightness of the desert. / To take shape, to be etched into the brightness of the desert. They are still far off. Two silhouettes. Their outlines, it seems, were never elsewhere than where they now stand. Two keyholes. Barely two black keyholes. The weather is beautiful. Inanely beautiful. Just beautiful. Invisible until this very second, they are, nothing but the two of them, sealed in space" (14-15). The two characters proceed to wander through the desert in this picaresque tale ranging from the absurd to the fantastic or mystical, lost in a space where perception and illusion are synonymous and where the focal distance between subject and object, self, and other shifts like the drifting sand that surrounds them. Errancy is a recurring theme in Dib's prose and poetry, coupled with a deceptively cumulative style relying on repetition and variation rather than plot or narrative. Such characteristics have led some critics to link Dib's writings with Sufi mysticism (see, e.g., Sari-Mostefa-Kara). Noting the tendency to locate Maghrebi writers such as Dib and his contemporary Kateb Yacine in the tradition of Sufism as self-evident but unlikely to elucidate their writing, Tengour highlights how the experiential quality of Dib's narrative commands complete and dynamic engagement from the reader: "Everything our poet writes is a game of make-believe and unveiling, in which extreme vigilance is required in order to avoid the traps of discovery" (*Dans le soulèvement* 64).

It would be futile, suggests Tengour, to attempt to "solve the mystery," because such discovery would be an illusion (*Dans le soulèvement* 64). This concept is central to Dib's ontological worldview:

Empire of the eternal, the desert is, by the same token, empire of the ephemeral. This the geomancers never forget when they predict your future in the sand. Have you noticed how they proceed? One measure of sand, they pour it out between them and you, spread it, then, with agile fingers, they scrawl signs, which they erase just as rapidly with the flat of their hand to start again, all the while murmuring ramblings you find difficult to understand and retain. And what is left in the end? A pile of sand returned to its original state, mute but on the verge of speaking again in order to murmur to you, what? The same thing, in order to teach you that you are — you. This,

this abyss of the essence, the Algerian carries within him, within his imagination, if not his waking consciousness, carries its imprint. (*L'Arbre* 19)

Desert, angels, light. Sufism, Errancy. These elusive themes are woven into the fabric of Dīb's oeuvre. Mindful of Tengour's admonition not to "solve the mystery," a translator of Maghrebi Francophone literature nevertheless seeks to grasp and convey in the target language the multiple resonances in the source text: the challenge is to preserve the ghost of the Arabic language and culture without undue interpretation.

Against the backdrop of a secular aesthetic permeated with Sufi heritage, Dīb engages with modernist and post-modern literature while never losing sight of his native culture. An appreciation of this extensive intertextuality and of the socio-political and cultural context in which he wrote is a prerequisite in formulating a translation strategy for his oeuvre. While his interplay with contemporary forms is evident, I propose to contextualize some lexical, syntactic, and intertextual elements of Dīb's oeuvre with reference to three Oriental schemas and examine how they serve to develop a transcultural "reference system": the *Mu'allaqāt* (odes), Sufi symbolism, and Farīd ud-Dīn Attār's *Conference of the Birds*. I rely on translations from Persian and Arabic together with translators' notes and comments, drawing also on classical and post-classical forms as guided by Dīb's implicit or explicit intertexts.

There is some dispute as to the number of extant pre-Islamic *Mu'allaqāt*. There exist several English translations: the 1894 *The Seven Poems Suspended in the Temple at Mecca* translated by F.E. Johnson, annotated glosses "intended to be nothing more than an aid to the student" ("Preface" n.p.) and the 1957 *The Seven Odes: The First Chapter in Arabic Literature* translated by John Arthur Arberry, while only five odes were translated by Mary Catherine Bateson in 1970, including a linguistic analysis of their morphology and phonology. Jacques Berque translated a more comprehensive selection into French in the 1979 *Les Dix grandes odes arabes de l'Anté-Islam. Les Mu'allaqāt*. The *Mu'allaqāt*-s' first known mention dates to the sixth century AD, although they are believed to have been written down over the following two or three centuries (see Holes 147-48). According to Bateson, however, the consistency and rigor of the *Mu'allaqāt* suggest that by the sixth century they were already the product of a mature Arab oral tradition which could go back as far as 300 AD (23). Whether these odes are truly pre-Islamic or conveniently relegated to this era by an overzealous Islamic rejection of poetry, is a moot point. Berque explains that the violence, irrationality, brutality, and sensuality expressed in the *Mu'allaqāt* grated against Islamic conscience (36). The prophet Mohammed, in reproaching poets for their idle words, refused the notions of plurality and ambiguity so fundamental to poetry and stood to define all aspects of individual and collective life (39) and thus the prophet's castigation of poetry threw down a "challenge at once ontological and existential ... to the old world of *Jāhiliya*" (165).

More literary genres to arise in pre-Mamluk times include the *risāla* (epistle), which flourished in the Abbasid dynasty (see Al-Musawi 109). Perhaps the most popular of these was to become the *riqla*, a form of travelogue related to the earlier *qasīda*, the basic form of the *Mu'allaqāt*, but characterized by more specific records of time and location (see Hāmeen-Anttila 138-39). The *maqāmat*, dating back to the tenth century, was a brief episodic or anecdotal text written in rhythmic or rhymed prose usually between two and ten pages-long in which the narrator is duped by a deft and devious protagonist. *Maqāmat* were often collected together to form a loose narrative and are thought by some to parody the religious *hadīth* form (see Stewart 145-49). It is reasonable to expect that these traditional forms of Arabian literature from the pre-Islamic period to the Ottoman Empire offered rich intertextual fodder for the Maghrebi writer, as did the rise in the twelfth century of the Andalusian *zajal*, the *muwashshaha*, and its closing refrain the *kharja* all of which broke with the classical monorhyme of the *qasīda* (see Joris and Tengour 44). Dīb's *Le Désert sans détour* with its short chapters and picaresque characters recalls the *maqāmat*. More generally, the wandering style in Dīb's later narratives where time and place are barely sketched out recalls the *qasīda*. Some formal elements of Arabic literature, many of which are rooted in these early odes, are identifiable in Dīb's work and some of their thematic, syntactic, and metaphoric features are analyzed as they relate to the *Mu'allaqāt*, but with recourse also to the *Qur'ān* with which both the *Mu'allaqāt* and Sufi texts are linked.

According to Berque, the *Mu'allaqāt* varied in terms of the ordering of motifs, individual inflection, and collective address, but nevertheless opened with "a mystery, more or less constant from piece to piece. And it is upon this mystery, comparable to the traces of an abandoned encampment, *at'lāl*, that these ancient songs at first invite us to dwell" (Berque 18). An illustration of this characteristic opening sequence can be found in the nostalgic evocation that marks the beginning of the poet T'arafa's *Mu'allaqā*: the following are four different translations:

There are traces of Kholah in the stony, sandy plain of Thahmad, which appear like the marks, (*lit. remains*), of tattooing on the back of the hand. (*The Seven Poems Suspended* 31)

There are traces yet of Khawla in the stony tract of Thahmad
apparent like the tattoo-marks on the back of a hand. (*The Seven Odes* 83)

Khawla (has) remnants in the gravel-plain of Thahmad which
show-up like remains of tattooing on the back of the hand. (Bateson 143)

Il ne reste de Khawla sur les schistes de Thahmad
que des vestiges qui remontent comme un reste de
tatouage
sur le dos de la main (*Les Dix grandes odes* 149)

Each translation offers a different insight into the source text and the translator's approach. Berque's version represents the rhythm and form on the page and he infuses the tattoo simile (introduced by the particle *ka*) with added vigor as "vestiges ... climb the back of the hand." Bateson's syntactic gloss shows there was no finite verb in the source text, a good illustration of the odes' characteristic analogy by juxtaposition. Bateson hyphenates "gravel-plain" thus providing the reader with an insight into the original denotations of the Arabic roots. Similarly, Johnson's literal lexical approach conveys the compound referent with the adjectival phrase "stony, sandy plain."

Opening with an evocation of the *at'lāl*, then, is fundamental to the schema of the *Mu'allaqāt*. A similar evocation recurs in the opening lines of many poetry collections by Dīb, starting with his 1961 *Ombre Gardienne*: "Fasten your doors / Women, bitter sleep / Will flow through your nerves, / Water, sand have erased / The trace of your steps, / Nothing belongs to you" (Joris and Tengour 297). The epigraph for Dīb's 1970 collection *Formulaires* refers to the "word of the stone," an evocation perhaps of the "writing entrusted to the hard stones" in the second line of Labīd's *Mu'allaqā* (*Seven Poems Suspended* 92): "for all the shapes in the sand / in wind and old age / I bring you my face / lunar and very low / a walker advancing in his shadow / fabulous word of the stone / lord as though inside it the night / had forgotten its clefts" (*Oeuvres* 61). His 1975 *Omneros* opens with "Publication de la fraîcheur," evoking the geomancy of sand: "to ignore the sand to invoke the sand / futile instant of sand" (*Oeuvres* 101). Further, Tengour describes how Dīb in his 1996 *L'Aube Ismaël — louange* relates to the Intifada in Palestine by exploring the mythical origins of the conflict instead of focusing on the contemporary event ("Mohammed" 23). This difficult text, which plays with equanimity on "all three revealed religions" while refusing to vest lineage and filiation with divine authority, opens in the desert with an untitled stanza in italics: "The desert / With its lungs / And forgetting of words. // Every which way / The hot wind storms / And upon the valley, forgetting, / The steepness of dunes" (*Oeuvres* 283). The opening poem of Dīb's 1998 *L'Enfant-jazz*, "L'Oubli," conjures remembrance and the opening poem of his 2000 *Le Cœur insulaire* is entitled "Le Chant du sable" (*Oeuvres* 313, 381). Thus of Dīb's nine poetry collections, six start in the style of the *qasīda*. According to Tengour, the basic themes of the *Mu'allaqāt* play a key role in Dīb's poetic heritage: "the self-erasing trace ... the unanswered invocation ... and the remembrance to the (female) lover" ("Mohammed" 9).

In addition to poetic structure, elements of form and syntax in the *Mu'allaqāt* are notable in Dīb's writing. In contrast to the *Qur'ān*, which employs a loosely stylized prose, the *Mu'allaqāt* follow comparatively strict formal features: every line of the poem consists of two hemistichs and must end with the same rhyme. Enjambment is prohibited and rare and this renders the line "the basic unit of [classical] Arabic poetry" (Bateson 35). Berque, whose translation conveys their rhythm and wealth of diction, compares the phonemic length of each hemistich roughly to that of the alexandrine, while Bateson breaks each down into fourteen feet and Tengour compares their rhythm to that of the "camel's gait" (51; see also Bateson 35; Tengour and Campbell).

The ancient meter, rhythm, and rhyme of the *qāṣida* are not generally apparent in Dīb's poetry, nor do the lexical reaches of the *Mu'allaqāt* play a prominent part in his characteristically ascetic verse. Several traditional syntactic elements, however, can be detected. The extent to which this owes to the influence of Arabic or to these early poetic forms is probably impossible to disentangle. Bateson, noting an analysis by Alfred Bloch, remarked on differences in word order between Arabic poetry and prose, some of which seem pertinent to Dīb's poetry (Bloch qtd. in Bateson 32-33). One example is the higher use of inflection to indicate case and mode, as opposed to word order as in Arabic prose (Bateson 32). The French language carries a number of morphological markers which allow more flexibility in word order than English, as in these lines from Dīb's poem "Mériidienne": "mais seule voltige autour de moi / l'abeille aux ailes éblouissantes" (*Oeuvres* 41). The following syntactic crib matches the word order of the source and shows how the English adjective "alone" ("seule") fails to indicate that this is a singular, feminine adjective, epithet to the subject of the finite verb "flutters," a subject in turn only revealed in the next line as "the bee" ("l'abeille"): "but | alone [singular feminine adjective] | flutters | around me | the bee [singular feminine subject] | with wings blinding." To maintain the crib's word order would be to flaunt canonical English expectations of subject/verb/object in succession, a practice that would be considered archaic or contrived in contemporary poetry. Yet to move the subject to the first line would be to break the anticipation this line creates, to tamper with the line as "the basic unit of Arabic poetry" referred to above and to damp this subliminal evocation of the Arabic line where "the Arabic verb often stands without any subject," all of which are suggestive of the ghost of the Arabic in this poem.

The syntactic form of the simile in Arabic is principally the nominative sentence, often introduced by the comparative particle *ka*. Keil-Sagawe summarizes this key characteristic as "Parataxis, nominalization (the infinitive), ellipsis of the verb, [all of these] can, sometimes, though not always easy to detect, refer back to an Arabic syntactic substrate" (11). Berque suggests that this form of simile, often by juxtaposition of recurrent motifs, is the fundamental driver of the *qasīda*: "The poem as a whole constitutes one great *as though*" (28). Berque gives the following example from "Un roi errant" by Imrū'l-Qays: "As if in the morning the summit of the peak of Mujaimir by reason of the flood and débris round it, were the whirl of a spindle" (*The Seven Poems* 29) ("Pareille demain matin sera la cime du Mujaymar, / dans la cure, les épaves / à la rotation d'un fuseau" [*Les Dix grandes odes* 74]). The paratactic particle *ka* is rendered in French by the adjectival phrase "pareille ... à" with the addition of the finite verb "sera" and in Johnson's translations by "as if" and the finite verb "were." The inverted image of the mountain as rotating spindle in Imrū'l-Qays's poem illustrates a key poetic device in the *Mu'allaqāt*, described in detail by Berque (26), but pertaining also to Sufi mysticism. The inversion of images is favoured by Dīb as in the passage cited earlier from *Le Désert sans détour* where silhouettes are seen as "keyholes." Another example lies in his allegory of the *barzakh*, which offers an insight into his own perspective on translation. The inverted image can also be seen in the poem tellingly entitled "Contre-jour" (literally "Against the Light" or "Backlight"): "And it is ocean, / Ocean, its soothing arms holding the sun" (*Oeuvres* 41).

The importance in the *Mu'allaqāt* of the simile as "a metaphor that resonates on several levels" is elaborated in detail by Berque (21). He distinguishes between the broad themes of the *Mu'allaqāt* (the *at'lāl*, the errancy) and the specific motifs from Bedouin life which serve to nourish the metaphor. Berque notes in T'arafa's ode the juxtaposition from one line to the next of wildly disjunctive images from the gazelle to dunes to the portal of a castle to a roman arch to leather as a means of mobilizing the listener through these raw images from their day-to-day experience: "The most moving feature [of this process], by which I mean its most mobilizing feature, is the rich diversity of its evocations, far more so than their respective compatibility or mutual cohesion" (25). This power to mobilize a wide range of disjunctive evocations in the listener through parataxis and discontinuity is tied in the *Mu'allaqāt* to images with a resonance long gone. Dīb uses parataxis in a similar way, but the images he activates or "mobilizes" take the form of everyday objects (tables, chairs), elemental "objects" (light and shadow, fire, water, sand, and snow), symbolic "objects" (trees, birds), and relational symbols (windows, doors, the veil, the mirror, the gaze). With this basic inventory of "motifs," much like the inventory of Bedouin desert life outlined by Berque, he renders resonant and often disquieting metaphors in the sensibility of the modern reader. While many of these motifs probably originated for Dīb in Sufi or Qur'anic texts, they also feature in non-Islamic religious, philosophical, and poetic

discourse. The difference lies in the way these symbols or metaphysical objects are made to signify. Whereas Christianity is founded on "the way of love," Islam is founded on "the way of knowledge" and Sufism, also based on the "way of knowledge," "carries it to its highest form, knowledge which illuminates" (Bakhtiar 7). The intuitive symbolism of Sufi images, while specific in Sufi doctrine, explores areas of philosophical and religious inquiry that are not confined to cultural boundaries: the nature of perception and illusion, the search for the Self, the question of essence versus existence, the twentieth century's loss of faith in God.

According to Laleh Bakhtiar — who in 2007 translated the *Qur'an* into U.S. English — the origins of Sufism can be traced back to Ibn 'Abbas, when a special meaning of verse 65:12 of the *Qur'an* was revealed to him and by the beginning of the eighth century the followers of Ibn 'Abbas came to be known as Sufis. Importantly in terms of Dīb's frequent references to "celui qui dit, Je" in his 1990 *Neiges de Marbre*, Sufism places greater emphasis than traditional Islamists on the "Sacred Traditions" or *ḥadīth qudsī* which are not part of the *Qur'an*, where "the Divine speaks in the first person singular through the Prophet" (Bakhtiar 7; Massignon 510-11). Thus while in Dīb's writing the themes of the *Mu'allaqāt* offer a liminal, geo-historical reference system, the Sufi themes of the *Tasawwuf* offer another kind of liminal reference system, a socio-historical one in a religion that is considered heretic or at least "heterodox" with reference to the fundamental teachings of Islam.

Hédi Abdel-Jaouad coined the term *soufialisme* to describe the inextricable blend of French surrealism and Arabian Sufism in Maghrebi Francophone literature (243). Tengour was the first to make this link in his 1981 article "Le Surréalisme maghrébin", observing that the thirteenth-century Andalusian mystic poet Ibn 'Arabī was already a surrealist and drawing a parallel between Ibn 'Arabī's "divine inspiration" and twentieth-century surrealist descriptions of automatic writing. Referring to Dīb's surreal novels of the 1960s and 1970s, Tengour suggested that he was a "surrealist in the drift" (*Dans le soulèvement* 151). Tengour observed further that Sufi symbolism figured prominently in Dīb's images: "In his poetry, images of light (fire, heavenly bodies, stars, embers, flames...), of *l'amour fou* [crazed love] and carnal love in the same breath, of the trials of the flesh, these images often recall the metaphors of Sufi love poetry. Dīb of course toys with them" (Tengour and Campbell). Tengour's explanation brings to mind Dīb's erotic/esoteric *Omneros* and his 1979 poetry collection *Feu beau feu* (see *Oeuvres*). The title of the latter is also a play on words, as in addition to "fire," *feu* can mean "defunct" or "dead": "Fire that names itself // to be straw / before the flame // beautiful fire / to feed the fire // from time to time / to be its shadow too // to live at its feet / to earn its trust // from time to time / on bended knees to cross // to wander the night / laden with its poppies" (*Oeuvres* 159).

The symbol of fire in the opening stanza recalls one description of the way to illumination through knowledge in Sufi teachings, going beyond the Islamic emphasis on Knowledge through to Certainty: "The highest attainment, the Truth of Certainty, belongs to those who know fire" (Bakhtiar 7). Bakhtiar describes three stages on the path to illumination where fire symbolizes Truth: from knowing fire from its description, to seeing its light, to knowing it "from having been consumed in it" (7). On the basis of Tengour's comments and Bakhtiar's explanation of the role of fire in Sufi doctrine, this stanza can be interpreted on one level as an exploration of the Sufi quest and Dīb's cover note to *Feu beau feu* dedicated to "Louve" ("She-wolf"), does little to discourage such an interpretation (*Oeuvres* 157). However, there is equally little doubt that Dīb was not a practising Sufi according to Tengour: "It is true that Dīb never manifested a religious faith and always maintained a simple materialism. His is the real world, yet there remains a questioning of this world, a questioning of meaning, which affirms itself increasingly in his later texts" (Tengour and Campbell). Yet Sufi symbolism is a recurrent motif in Dīb's work and he quoted Sufi mystics. Fire, light and shadow, and birds and trees are symbols in many *surahs* of the *Qur'ān* (for a summary of Qur'anic symbols see Anawati and Gardet 20-21). In Sufism, however, these symbols have several specific layers of meaning subject to interpretation through *ta'wil*, the art of spiritual hermeneutics (Bakhtiar 27). The mystical poets — among whom perhaps the better known in the West are the twelfth-century mystic Attār and his thirteenth-century follower Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī — interpreted Qur'anic symbols in a manner directed at an "inward spiritual journey" which "shocked" the more literal followers of the *Qur'an* (Bakhtiar 112-13). These symbols were not to be understood in the Aristotelian sense of metaphor as they were not analogical, but the poet's description of a mystical experience itself (Bakhtiar 113).

Perhaps Dib's most overt allegory based on a Sufi theme lies in his 2003 *Simorgh*, a version of Attār's *The Conference of the Birds*. In the *Qur'ān* the bird "symbolizes the resurrection (or rather the immortality) of the soul" (Anawati and Gardet 21). In Attār's tale, each bird is the symbol of a "spiritual faculty" (Bakhtiar 37). In Dib's irreverent adaptation twelve birds arrive at their destination instead of thirty, but just eleven are visible in the mirror they encounter as none can see his own reflection (see Attār, *Le Language* 230, 297 to compare with *Simorgh* 19-20). And thus the question arises as to why Dib counted only twelve birds. Was it because the Sufi revelation says the numbers are irrelevant? Perhaps a play on the twelve apostles and the temporary absence of Judas at the Last Supper? A wry nod to the twinned "alexandrines" of the *Mu'allaqāt* (bearing in mind Berque's comment on their meter)? Possibly all of the above, and more, to be discovered perhaps when reading another passage in another poem or novel or possibly for no "reason" at all.

Dib's experiential style in the opening chapter of *Simorgh* draws on the Sufi and Gnostic conception of metaphor as (mystical) experience, as do his poetry and many other novels including *Cours sur la rive sauvage*, *Le Maître de chasse*, *Habel*, *Le Sommeil d'Eve*, and *Neiges de Marbre* to name a few. At the same time the long monologues through which he expresses these experiences are comparable to the postdramatic monologue (as defined by Lehmann). Dib's embrace of ambiguity and illusion — through, for example, his aesthetic engagement with the veil, the mirror, and the gaze — and of the relentless quest engage with the language and symbolism of the Sufi "Imagination" described by Henri Corbin which the latter dissociates through its capital initial from the day-to-day fantasy of the "imaginary" (4). Even when situating his novels in Western culture, Dib tends towards the syncretic (see Khadda 63-88). However, they resonate to some extent with both East and West because of their inherent transcultural symbolic value and their (post)modern style.

A recurrent motif, perhaps the most pervasive in Dib's writing, is his treatment of light. In their explanation of "illuminative" gnosis G.-C. Anawati and Louis Gardet cite its originator, the mystic Shihāb al-Dīn Yahyā al-Suhrawardī (born 1151) who quotes from the *Qur'an* before extolling his "angeology of lights": "Indeed is it not said in the Qur'an: 'God is the Light of the Sky and the Earth. This Light is like a hearth within which there is a flaming torch, a torch within a crystal ... It is Light upon light.' ... From this Light of light, a radiation endlessly engenders other sources of light, which, in their reciprocal radiation, taste the sensual joy of the primal Light ... And facing the sources of light are the *barzakh*, the tenebrous receptacles" (57-58). Dib explored the sense of the *barzakh* and its relationship with light as follows: "Even the night, when it falls, will not darken the circle of things, will not alter it, but, indelible presence, will retribute it to whiteness, touched by this same reflection of eternity — touched; guarded. We have made night and day into two Signs; we have made the Sign of night dark, light the Sign of day. What has happened to this part of the world; its days, its nights? Has it fallen in-between, where each component of time is confined to saying its opposite? In summer you are exiled from the night in the dead of night; in winter, exiled from the day at high noon. Night and day exiled one into the other and he who says, *I*, from self to self. A recorded deficit of sixteen days every year. Isn't this the *barzakh*, if it could exist and if one must live there?" (*Neiges* 98-99; emphases in the source text). According to Sufi doctrine, the realm of the *barzakh*, also known as '*alam-i-mithāl*', is the "world of symbols and similitudes, the *mundus imaginalis* ... a world of autonomous forms and meanings ... 'in suspense' in the place of their appearance, in the imagination, like an image suspended in a mirror" and expresses itself in the mystical dream (Bakhtiar 116). In Dib's oneiric writing this concept seems to coincide with *l'entre-deux*, the in-between, the neither *ici* nor *ailleurs*. In *Neiges de marbre* the *barzakh* also constitutes for Dib an apt analogy for the aporia of translation:

Sitting at my desk, I afford myself the luxury of rewriting a translation while forgetting the original text. Or at least I strive to forget it. Translating, solving equations, same thing, the equations ever ready to beg several answers at once, even the simplest ones. Which of these answers should be retained, since there must be only one? It hangs in the balance of a single breath. You are the scales from which the formula will derive, impose itself, inscribe itself in marble, word for word, and constitute the opacity capable of relegating the other tongue to the background, of dissolving it. This will not happen at once, your text remains for some time under its influence; the original is already a ghost, but it labours on the one you aim to piece together, this you must know and it isn't always easy to know this. I am at this stage, rewriting pages which, liberated from their primal state, must accede to a new birth. (*Neiges* 98-99)

Here Dib likens translation to an almost mystical experience, which "hangs in the balance of a single breath," spanning both the craft ("solving equations") and the art of translation (allowing the text to "accede to a new birth"). When translating the multi-layered, often non-canonical syntax and diction of Dib's style, the tension between equivalence and the domesticizing tendency to "bend" the untranslatable can result in closing off possible interpretations by settling for a narrower or broader signification. Dib's linguistic and cultural "terms of reference" are embedded in the surface structure or stylistic expression of the text (as opposed to, for example, more universal narrative devices of plot and character). For the intrasemiotic translator, there is a consequent danger in becoming too involved in the intricacies of the author's multivalent idiolect and thus of creating a static in-between desert caught between source and target, but speaking to neither. There are a number of ways to mitigate this effect, from providing *en face* translation with the source text which would enable an English version to take comparable, but not identical risks while making translation decisions transparent to readers of French and/or Arabic, to providing paratexts to the English translation for monoglot readers.

Another possibility is to move beyond the purely intrasemiotic: if the craft of translation lies in transposing intrasemiotic expression, the art of translation lies in somehow setting free an intersemiotic dimension so that the author's "Imagination" (after Henri Corbin) can be made apparent to the reader, audience, or participant. The diversity of style and cultural materials utilized by Dib, often in abrupt juxtaposition, calls perhaps for not "only one," but multiple versions not unlike the geomancers' "signs, which they erase just as rapidly with the flat of their hand to start again" (*L'Arbre* 19). For example, in a bi- or multilingual performance recited or sung, the referential role of words in translation traditionally constrained by the imperative to convey sense can be challenged to provide a richer sonic and semantic experience than could a univocal printed representation in the target language. The act of performing changes the script to a living score and opens the possibility of layering multiple versions. Further, as intonation, rhythm, and gesture change with each performance, an element of transience, something of the aporia of the translation act but also the "mystical dream," is shared with the audience.

The source text can also be "staged" through the medium of visual, auditory, or haptic semiotic systems beyond the linguistic realm. Such an approach was recently taken, for example, with an alternative version of the poem cited earlier from *L'Aube Ismaël*. This took the form of a multichannel, multilingual soundscape and visual installation contextualized in a gallery space to engage with contemporary themes of exile, migration, and identity (see Campbell, Jørgensen, Parkes <<http://www.gla.ac.uk/hunterian/learning/hunterianassociates/hagarinstallation/>>). In this "lived" environment the affect of the original poem was less mediated by the translator than aided by the creative imagination of the artists. In such an environment it is the participant who translates sensory cues to recreate a unique, individual semios: a poem without words ("The forgetting of words"), or with all words ("The wind's voice ... in endless jargon"), where differing perceptions of the soundscape depend on the participant's own culturally-mediated response to fragmented sounds, voices and languages. I posit that for some of Dib's experiential texts the performative approach can facilitate an ephemeral spatio-temporal experience of other-ness that stands closer to the source's "primal state" than a purely intrasemiotic translation could.

In conclusion, Dib's poetry and prose suggest that his writing goes beyond surrealism in the intensity of its ontological enquiry and appears to go beyond Sufism in its denial of the "essence" or "absolute" central to the Sufi quest. Rather, Dib displaces the dualism of essence and existence by seeking the in-between, the relation, the movement between subject and object. Through this singular syncretic approach, pre-Islamic evocation and Sufi-inspired form and image are transformed to deliver a distinctive contemporary nomadic oeuvre in a secular expression of the Sufi Imagination which invites a performative approach to translation.

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